

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate peoples' knowledge and attitudes about natural resources in the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine (A/P) system and management alternatives designed to protect these resources. Information in this report was collected through a scientific telephone survey of 1,133 people selected at random from across the entire state of North Carolina, as well as the Virginia portion of the A/P Study area. A mail survey was also completed by a sample of 662 public officials at the town, county and state levels from across North Carolina. Support of these groups is critical to accomplishing the ultimate goals of effective management.

An important focus of this research was to determine the attitudes of the general public and public officials regarding alternative management strategies to protect the natural and human resources in the A/P system. With the assistance of an advisory committee, fifteen different management alternatives were identified that cover the range of possible actions that could be taken. Attitudes about the roles of various interest groups in managing the A/P system were assessed. A determination was made of an individual's own willingness to pay for water quality protection, through a variety of alternative payment mechanisms. The general types of behavioral changes individuals would be willing to make were identified. Finally, attitudes were assessed about what public policy changes should be made to manage the A/P system. The following are some of the major findings of this study:

- Both public officials and the general public expressed only moderate awareness about the resources and problems of the A/P system. Proactive and strategic educational programs are needed to increase awareness and understanding.
- Almost all respondents placed high value on the resources of the A/P system. In fact, non-economic values were seen as more important than economic values, especially for the general public. This implies that educational efforts must focus on economic and noneconomic benefits and costs.
- Respondents expressed considerable concern over water pollution problems. However, respondents expressed more concern about water pollution for the whole state or local areas than for the A/P system. Concerns were even greater for the loss of fish and wildlife habitat in the A/P system than for water pollution, especially among the general public. This suggests the need to stress the importance of the A/P system for the entire state.
- Responses to the questions about the causes of pollution problems in the A/P system indicate considerable confusion and a general lack of knowledge. Both groups tend to see point sources as much more serious than nonpoint sources. This is counter to the technical data available for the A/P system.